

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Epithet, simile, zeugma, pun, oxymoron

Epithet

Epithet is an attributive characterisation of a person, thing or phenomena.

Epithet shows purely individual emotional attitude of the speaker to the object spoken of.

It is necessary to discriminate between epithet and logical attributes.

Logical attributes are purely objective, non-evaluative.

Classification of epithets

Epithet may be semantic and structural. Semantically epithet split into two groups:

1. those associated with the noun following and 2. those unassociated with it.

Associated epithet are those which point to a feature which is essential to the objects they describe. The idea expressed in the epithet is to a certain degree inherent in the concept of the object: fantastic terrors, dreary midnights.

Unassociated epithets are attributes used to characterized the object by adding a feature not inherent in it, i.e. a feature which may be so unexpected as to strike a reader by its novelty: voiceless sands, hard-burning smile.

Classification of epithets

Epithet may be divided into **language (traditional) epithet** and **speech epithet**.

Traditional epithet: *sweet smile, deep feeling, powerful influence;*

Speech epithet: *voiceless sands, slavish knees.*

Fixed epithets are used in ballads and folk songs: *true love, dark forest, красное солнце, добрый молодец.*

Classification of epithets

From the point of view of their compositional structure epithets may be **simple, compound, phrase, sentence epithets**.

Simple epithets are ordinary adjectives (true love).

Compound epithets are built like compound adjectives (cloud-shaped giant).

Phrase epithets are expressed by a phrase which is placed before the noun they refer to: “... *whispered the spinster aunt with true **spinster-aunt-like** envy*” (Ch. Dickens).

Sentence epithets are expressed by a sentence placed before the noun: “she gave Mrs. Smith **a you-know-how-men-are** look”.

Tip: An interesting structural detail of phrase or sentence epithet is that they are generally followed by the words: expression, air, attitude, look, ... which describe somebody's behavior or facial expression.

Simile

Simile is based on analogy between two things which possess some feature in common otherwise being entirely the similar:
He fights like a lion.

Simile has obligatory formal elements:

- ▣ A parallel object compared,
- ▣ A connective (may be conjunctive, notional word – seem, resemble, affixes – wise, like: *archwise, childlike*).

Ordinary comparison and simile must not be confused.

Comparison means weighing two objects belonging to one class of things.

To use a simile means to characterize one object by bringing it into contact with another object belonging to the entirely different classes of things: *sly as a fox, busy as a bee, stubborn as a mule*.

Zeugma

Zeugma is a figure of speech which consists of one main element and a number of adjuncts. The adjuncts represent semantically different word classes, differing in the type and degree of cohesion with the main element:

He *had* (the main element) *a good taste for wine and whiskey and emergency belt in his bedroom* (2 adjuncts) (G. Greene).

He *mourned* for his wife *with a keg of whiskey and three old army friends*.

The contrast between the syntactic identity of adjuncts and their semantic incompatibility is a means of creating different connotative effect (sarcastic, ironic).

Pun (play of words)

- a SD based on **the interaction of two well-known meanings** of a word or phrase.
- **Do not confuse** with zeugma: *zeugma* is the realization of two meanings with the help of a verb which is made to refer to different subjects or objects (direct or indirect). The *pun* is more independent.
- “The Importance of Being *Earnest*” (O.W.)
- “New butler? What’s become of Seppings?”
“*He’s gone.*”
“No, really?”
“To the seaside, for his holiday.” (P.G.Wodehouse)

Oxymoron

Oxymoron is a combination of two words mostly an adjective and an noun or an adverb with an adjective in which the meaning of the two clash being opposite in sense:

- *Oh, the sweetness of the pain!*
- *She was filled with a glad terror.*
- *The wordy silence troubled her.*

Frequently repeated oxymorons become **trite and lexicalized**, some of them have just become intensifiers: awfully nice, mighty small, frightfully happy.

Name the figure of speech

1. "Oh, the sweetness of the pain." (J. Keats)
2. A spasm of high-voltage nervousness ran through him. (T. H.)
3. He drank his orange juice in long cold gulps. (I.Sh.).
4. Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield are Good Bad Boys of American literature. (V.)
5. She had her breakfast and her bath. (S. M.)
6. The noon sun is lighting up red woundlike stains...
7. My love is like a red, red rose.(R.B.)